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AUTHOR Orlosky, Donald E.
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ABSTRACT

This paper treats the theoretical underpinnings of accountability, particularly as they relate to specifying competencies that are used to evaluate an individual teacher's effectiveness. Contingencies and factors that influence the selection of competencies are discussed. Stressed is the virtual impossibility of adequately preparing teachers to perform "competently" if the competencies are not properly delineated. In turn, it is stressed, unless accountability policies and accompanying procedures are brought under reasonable control in this way, we will not be able to honor the overriding intent of accountability--to hold a teacher responsible for pupils' learning. (Author/JA)

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Teacher Competence: To Do What?

by
Donald E. Orlosky
Professor of Education
University of South Florida

Any attempt to recommend the best program for the preparation of teachers is done at considerable peril for at least two reasons. One reason is that the purpose of the schools has not been uniformly delineated and therefore the expectations for teachers varies throughout the land. The second reason is that the current state of knowledge about teacher preparation is so thin or suspect that the relationship between teacher training, teacher performance, and pupil learning is unclear. Both of these problems must be addressed before proceeding to any discussion of appropriate teacher preparation programs.

The preparation of the teacher is a function of the tasks the teacher is expected to perform and the work of the teacher is a function of the purposes of the schools. Agreement on the tasks that teachers must be prepared to perform is the basis for deriving the specific responsibility of the teacher training program and this introduces the fundamental question of the role of the schools. A distinction is made by Bereiter (1) among three functions the schools might perform that is useful for this discussion. Bereiter differentiates between Education, Child Care, and Training. Or put in slightly different language, one might consider these three categories to include the Educational function, the Schooling function, and the Custodial function of the schools.

Education consists of the effort to shape the totality of an individual in respect to his personality and the establishment of personal behavior in a wide range of areas from serving as an adequate parent to becoming a good citizen. Schooling is restricted to the effort to help pupils obtain the knowledge, language, concepts, principals, laws, and rules that constitute given fields of

SP 006 936

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study. The Custodial function is a caretaking task that is inherent in the schools because the schools collect the young for a portion of the day and supervise them while they are under their direction. The viewpoint in this presentation is that programs for training teachers should only concentrate on preparing people to carry out the Schooling function.

If training programs attempt to prepare trainees to serve the Educational function, then the wide range of responsibilities encompassed in that task imposes an impossible burden on the training program. Since even the most conscientious parents and the most thoroughly trained psychiatrists, social workers, or counselors struggle with the tasks implied in the Educational function there is little reason to believe that a teacher in the limited amount of preparation time provided in his program could also be trained to assume responsibility for the Education of his pupils. In addition, attention to the global goals of Education provides little assurance that the teacher will acquire any of the abilities that he will eventually be expected to employ.

In respect to the Custodial function of the schools, it should be carried forth with adequate resources, love, and attention to create a comfortable learning environment for schooling. Reasonable screening and selection procedures of candidates for teacher preparation programs and later evaluation techniques that will eliminate unduly harsh or cruel teachers from the classroom should be sufficient to prevent the Custodial funciton from being mishandled. (6:19-23)

If the Educational function is the responsibility of other agencies and if the Custodial function is met by selecting individuals whose behavior is positive and humane, then the task of the teacher preparation program that remains is to prepare teachers to provide for the Schooling of the young. Bereiter has summarized this viewpoint by stating:

> Such narrowing of teaching effort is likely to strike school people as immoral. What is to become of the child as a whole? Although I can by no means prove it, I want to show as best I can in this article that schools do not and cannot successfully educate - that is, influence how children turn out in any important way. The most they can do successfully is provide child care and training. They could do a much better job of both than they do now, but in order to be free to do a better job they must abandon the idealistic but misguided effort to educate. (1: 391-392)

In a similar vein, Coleman (2) advocates that the home and the work-place are where changes should be made to provide the Educational function of the society and he stresses that:

> ... The mode of organization of schools, the fact that they are staffed by teachers who themselves have been measured by academic performance, the fact that they lead in a natural progression to more and more specialized institutions, the universities and then graduate schools - all this means that they are destined to fail as educational institutions in areas other than teaching of intellectual skills. (2:229)

The point is that the schools have served the residual function of doing anything not provided for elsewhere to the extent that schools are now expected to provide services that they are not equipped or prepared to supply. As a consequence, it is not possible for the schools to succeed in this broad responsibility and they fail. And the failure results in loss of public confidence in the schools, frenetic behavior in teacher training institutions to cover the waterfront in their training programs and doing little of it well, and the realization by the teacher in the classroom that he cannot perform adequately in the range of responsibilities thrust upon him. In such a state of affairs, training programs for teachers are vague, teacher responsibilities are broad and complex, conscientious teachers labor excessively to accomplish unreasonable goals, pupils pass through the schools with less schooling than they could otherwise acquire, and the state of the teaching profession and the train-

ing programs that support it remain difficult to define.

A second factor to consider in recommending teacher preparation programs is the lack of proven relationship between teacher training, teacher performance, and pupil learning. Ideally, teacher education programs should be based on the competence required of teachers to produce desired pupil outcomes. A beginning step was taken by Rosenshine and Furst (7) when they reviewed the research literature to find relationships between teacher abilities or characteristics and pupil learning. In their report they concluded that teachers were more effective if their teaching behavior was appropriate in respect to : clarity, variability, enthusiasm, task-orientation, student opportunity to learn criterion material, use of student ideas, criticism, structuring, types of questions, probing, and level of difficulty of instruction. Identifying teacher characteristics or abilities does not automatically lead to programs that will train teachers to acquire the desired abilities and that task still remains. And it remains for those who administer the pre-service and in-service programs of teacher education to determine specific learnings and to solve this instructional problem.

One could also argue accurately that the number of teacher competencies represented in the research literature as being related to pupil learning is a short and vague list and needs to be clarified and expanded. This shortage of knowledge with proven consequences is articulated in a statement by Turner (10) when he describes the current situation:

> At the present time the lack of specificity about the competencies included in the teacher education curriculum and the lack of measures to establish degrees of teacher competency preclude considerations of the relationship between the effects of teacher training and change in pupil behavior. It is essential, therefore, that teacher educators concentrate on the development of measures of teacher competency and contribute to the development of measures of school effectiveness. Unless such measures are developed, the validity of teacher education curricula will remain unknown. (10:9)

In a publication commissioned by the Performance Based Teacher Education committee of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Elam (3) discussed the state of knowledge about PBTE and also raised the question of measurement instruments to be applied to the performance of teachers to assess their competence. In a telling statement he concluded that:

> Thus, one of the elements of PBTE that seems likely to receive only the attention that is left after other needs are taken care of is the very one that is unique to PBTE and critical to its success - adequate evaluation. Unless there is a change of focus on the part of developers - perhaps a concentration of effort involving division of labor among institutions in some kind of exchange network - and unless the federal government, seeing this as necessary, provides massive new resources and support for the creation of adequate evaluation devices as well, PBTE may well fail to achieve more than a fraction of its potential. (3:22)

The literature on teacher competence and PBTE consistently includes the admission that few teacher competencies have been identified that correlate with pupil learning, that research activity must continue in analyzing teacher behavior and pupil learning to validate effective practices, and that measurement instruments must be developed to assess teacher performance and to increase confidence in predicting the performance of teachers on the basis of the training programs they complete.

The shortage of knowledge might imply that a moratorium on teacher training should be declared until answers are found but that is not feasible, desirable, or necessary. A better solution is for those responsible for teacher training to rely on the knowledge reported in the literature as a beginning and to derive additional competencies from a mixture of common sense, taxonomies, and nomothetic systems. After reaching agreement on the specific learnings for the prospective or in-service teacher, the settings in which those learnings will be displayed and the instrumentation that will measure the acquisition of appropriate abilities and knowledge must also be determined. By establishing

such a training program, the proper beginning to find better answers will be launched. This analysis and implementation of the teacher education program should occur in the generic competencies in the pedagogical field and in the specific competencies in the basic fields of study.

Any training agency that plans to operate its training program at this level should include three areas of preparation for teachers. The three areas necessary for an adequate training program include the attainment of perceptual abilities, concept acquisition, and the performance skills and abilities of the teacher. Many of the arguments for recommending these three areas and possibilities for their implementation have been previously described in Teachers for the Real World (8) and only a brief statement on these three elements will be provided here.

Perceptual training should enable the teacher to observe and identify the cues provided in the behavior of pupils, peers, administrators, and others with whom he works. Unless the teacher is trained to perceive the events that he encounters, he is defenseless to cope systematically and effectively with his responsibilities. Without perceptual abilities the teacher cannot determine the presence or absence of events that provide him with evidence that will help him make decisions about his own behavior.

The teacher should also possess the ability to classify the behavior of others into meaningful categories which will enable him to interpret and diagnose behavior. To carry out this classification task requires that the teacher possess knowledge of concepts in pedagogy and the disciplines and that he associate the behavior he witnesses with his knowledge of those concepts.

And finally, in addition to acquiring perceiving and interpreting competencies, the teacher should develop the abilities and skills of teaching and be able to apply appropriate behavior to the situations he perceives and dia-

gnoses.

Eventually the trainee in a teacher education program must demonstrate his ability to carry out these competencies in the school setting. However, most pre-service and some in-service training may not be conveniently or effectively arranged in classrooms. A promising approach to solving this problem is in the development of materials - printed, video, film, or otherwise - that will give the trainee specified help in concept and skill acquisition and concurrently with working through these materials he can develop perceptual skills in the observations he makes. Protocol materials (4,5,9) are being developed that will help in concept acquisition and training materials have been flowing forth in abundance during the past few years. As these materials survive field-testing and user trials, they may serve to establish programs that will satisfy demands for validity and effectiveness of training programs.

At the outset, two problems were listed in respect to the training of teachers. Namely, what should the schools be expected to do and how can teacher training programs operate with confidence when validation of their effectiveness is lacking. The most reasonable solution to these problems is that the training of teachers should focus on preparing people to provide schooling and to leave the matters of education to other agencies that should be able to do it better anyway. And secondly, teacher preparation programs should proceed with current knowledge about teacher education and build a program that will enable teachers to perceive the teaching situations that confront them, interpret those situations accurately, and to have the abilities and knowledge to remediate the learning problems they encounter. After implementing such a program, the follow-up activities that examine the validity of the training program can, and must, be carried forth.

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